



Your Stories

This page will feature the selected short story, poem, or article of the month along with its English translation.

Bilingual writers, we would appreciate your help with the translation of Indonesian work into English. Please contact us at dalangpublishing@gmail.com

Please adhere to the following maximum word limits:

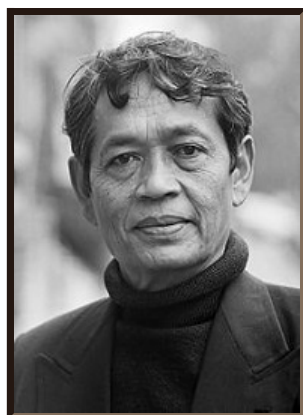
Short story – 3000 words.

Poem – 500 words / poem – please submit 5 poems on individual pages.

Article – 2000 words.

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Kuli Kontrak



Mochtar Lubis is one of the prominent literary figures in Indonesia. He was born in Padang, West Sumatra on March 7, 1922 and died in Jakarta on July 2, 2004. His novels are *Jalan Tak Ada Ujung* (1952), *Harimau!* (1975), and a short stories collection *Perempuan* (1956). His novel *Maut dan Cinta* (1977) was translated into English and published by Dalang Publishing into *Love Death and Revolution* (2015).

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Kuli Kontrak

Lampu-lampu di beranda dan kamar depan telah dipadamkan. Ayah sedang menulis di kamar kerjanya. Dan kami anak-anak berkumpul di kamar tidur ayah dan ibu, mendengarkan cerita ibu sebelum kami disuruh tidur. Ibu bercerita tentang seorang pelesit, pemakan orang, yang dapat menukar- nukar tubuhnya dari manusia menjadi macan dan kemudian jadi manusia kembali, berganti-ganti.

Untuk mengenal pelesit itu orang harus melihat bandar bibirnya yang licin di bawah hidung, dan kalau dia berjalan maka tumitnya yang ke depan. Sungguh amat menakutkan dan mengasyikkan cerita ibu itu, dan kami duduk sekelilingnya berlingkungan dalam selimut; agak ketakutan, amat menyenangkan benar.

Sedang kami begitulah tiba-tiba terdengar ribut di luar rumah dan kemudian terdengar opas penjaga rumah kami berteriak-teriak memanggil ayah dari luar, "Inyik! Inyik!"

Kami semua terkejut.

Ibu berhenti bercerita.

Ayah terdengar bergegas membuka pintu kamar kantornya dan terus ke beranda.

"Aduh, ada lagi kampung yang perang, barangkali," seru ibu.

The Contract Coolies



Novita Dewi started writing poetry and short stories during her elementary and middle school days. She published in *Si Kuncung* and *Bobo*, children magazines, as well as wrote for the children's columns featured in *Kompas* and *Sinar Harapan* (now *Suara Pembaruan*). She now nurtures her interest in literature by writing articles about literature and translation for scientific journals. Novita is widely published. The short stories translated and published by Dalang Publishing are her first attempts of literary translation.

She currently teaches English literature courses at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Novita can be reached at novitadewi@usd.ac.id or novitadewi9@gmail.com.

The Contract Coolies

The lights on the porch and in the front room were turned off. Ayah, Father, was writing in his study. And we children were gathered in our parents' bedroom, listening to Ibu, Mother, tell us a bedtime story. Ibu told us about a pelesit, man-eater, who could transform from a human into a tiger.

To recognize a pelesit, Ibu said, look for a shallow groove at the center of his clean-shaven, upper lip; and when he walks, his heels point forward.

Ibu's story was very frightening yet thrilling, and we, wrapped in a blanket, huddled around her, slightly scared, enormously enthralled.

All of a sudden, there was a noise outside the house, followed by our opas, gatekeeper, calling for Ayah. "Sir! Master!"

We were all startled.

Ibu stopped telling her story.

We heard Ayah open his office door and hurry to the porch.

"Oh, dear, perhaps there's war again in one of the villages," Ibu exclaimed.

Dan kami pun mengikutinya ke beranda.

Di masa itu ayah bekerja sebagai demang di Kerinci dan dalam tahun dua puluhan dan tiga puluhan itu keadaan daerah itu seperti di masa abad pertengahan saja. Karena soal pembagian air sawah, soal kerbau dan sebagainya, satu kampung lalu menyatakan perang kepada kampung yang lain. Senjata yang lazim dipakai dalam perang ini ialah batu sebesar telur ayam diayunkan ke arah musuh dengan tali-tali istimewa untuk pengayunkannya. Baru seminggu yang lalu ayah pergi ke Sungai Deras menghentikan perang semacam ini dan dia kena peluru batu kesasar yang merenggutkan topi helmnya dari kepalanya. Untunglah tidak tepat, kenanya. Hanya pening juga kepala ayah beberapa lama dibuatnya.

Baru setelah perkelahian dapat dihentikan oleh polisi dengan menembakkan senapan berkali-kali ke udara dan kedua kepala kampung dari desa yang berperang itu dipertemukan, dan mereka mendengar ayah nyaris kena lemparan batu mereka yang berperang, maka kepala-kepala kampung itu meminta-minta maaf dan ampun, dan berkata bahwa mereka tidak bermaksud memerangi ayah sama sekali. Akhirnya karena menyesalnya mereka dengan batu yang menyasar itu, maka dengan mudah mereka menerima usul perdamaian ayah dan membagi air untuk sawah-sawah mereka dengan berdamai.

Ketika opas penjaga rumah berteriak-teriak memanggil ayah, hari hampir jam sembilan malam. Di bawah, beberapa orang polisi dengan komandannya berdiri, dan tidak terdengar olehku mula-mula apa katanya pada ayah. Kami segera juga disuruh masuk, oleh ayah, kembali.

Ayah masuk sebentar dan dengan cepat berpakaian. Dia mengenakan sepatu kulitnya yang panjang, mengenakan pistolnya di pinggangnya, topi helmnya, dan kemudian segera ke luar.

Tiada lama kemudian ibu masuk, dan berkata, "Nah, kini anak-anak semua, tidurlah. Ayah mesti pergi. Ada kuli kontrak lari." Kelihatan ibu merasa cemas di hatinya.

Esok pagi kami dengar dari Abdullah, opas penjaga rumah bahwa ada lima kuli kontrak yang melarikan diri dari onderneming Kayu Aro, setelah menikam opzichter Belanda.

Ketika kami pulang sekolah jam 12 siang, ayah belum kembali juga. Ketika dekat magrib, ayah belum juga pulang. Ibu mulai cemas dan sebentar-sebentar dia ke depan melihat ke jalan. Beberapa kali aku dengar ibu bercakap-cakap dengan opas Abdullah, yang berkata supaya ibu jangan khawatir.

Ayah tiba ketika hari telah malam dan kami semua telah disuruh tidur. Aku dengar ayah bercakap-cakap dengan ibu sampai jauh malam dan kemudian rumah pun sunyilah.

Esoknya kami dengar bahwa kuli-kuli kontrak itu telah tertangkap semuanya dan telah dibawa ke penjara. Penjara terletak di bawah bukit kecil di belakang rumah kami. Dari kebun buah-buahan dan sayur di belakang rumah, jika kami naik pohon jeruk yang besar, dapatlah dilihat lapangan belakang penjara, tempat orang hukuman dibariskan tiap hari atau diberi hukuman.

Dari kebun itulah terdengar suara orang gila yang ditahan dalam penjara, menyanyi-nyanyi atau memaki-maki. Mengapa di masa itu orang gila dimasukkan penjara dan tidak ke rumah sakit tidak jadi pertanyaan bagiku, waktu itu. Kadang-kadang asyik juga aku mendengarkan nyanyian yang beriba-iba, kemudian lantang mengeras, dan lebih hebat lagi jika telah mulai memaki-maki, amat sangat kotornya kata-katanya. Sungguh sedap selagi kecil itu dapat mendengar perkataan-perkataan yang terlarang demikian.

Kemudian ibu bercerita bahwa ayah dan polisi dapat menangkap tiga orang kuli kontrak yang melawan opzichter Belanda itu. Hanya tiga orang, tidak lima orang seperti diceritakannya semula. Mereka tertangkap dalam hutan tidak jauh dari onderneming, separuh kelaparan dan kedinginan dan penuh ketakutan. Mereka tiada melawan sama sekali. Dan ketika melihat ayah maka mereka segera datang menyerah dan berkata, "Pada kanjeng kami menyerahkan nasib dan memohon keadilan."

Menurut ibu, yang didengarnya dari ayah, sebabnya terjadi penikaman terhadap opzichter Belanda itu karena opzichter itu selalu mengganggu istri mereka. Dan rupa-rupanya kuli-kuli kontrak itu sudah mata gelap dan tak dapat lagi menahan hati melihat opzichter itu mengganggu istri-

And we followed her to the porch.

In those days, my father worked as a demang, district head, for the Kerinci Regency, in Jambi Province, Sumatra; and in the 1920s and 1930s, conditions there were like those in the Middle Ages. Simple issues, such as the distribution of irrigation water for rice fields, problems regarding buffaloes, etc., could cause villages to declare war on one another.

The weapons most commonly used in these wars were slings made with special ropes to hold stones as big as chicken eggs. The sling was swung in an arc, releasing the stone with high-velocity force at the enemy.

Just a week ago, when my father went to the Deras River to stop a war there, a stray stone hit his helmet. Luckily, it was just a scrape. But, it still gave Ayah a headache for several days.

The war at Deras River ended only after police fired their rifles many times into the air, and the two leaders from the warring villages were brought together. After hearing that one of their stones had hit Ayah's helmet, the village heads apologized, saying that they did not intend to hurt Ayah at all, and they asked his forgiveness. Because they were deeply sorry about the errant stone, both village heads quickly accepted Ayah's proposed solution and peacefully divided the water for their fields.

When Abdullah the gatekeeper called out for my father that night, it was almost nine o'clock. Several police officers and their commander stood in the yard outside the house. I couldn't hear what the commander told my father, because Ayah immediately sent Ibu and us children back inside.

When Ayah came back in, he quickly dressed. He pulled on his leather boots, strapped his gun to his waist, put on his helmet, and then left.

Not long after, Ibu came into our bedroom, looking worried. "Well, all of you go to sleep now. Your father left. Some contract coolies, laborers, ran away."

The next morning, Abdullah the gatekeeper told us that five contract coolies had fled from the Kayu Aro onderneming, plantation, after stabbing a Dutch opzichter, supervisor.

When we came home from school at noon that day, my father had still not returned. By twilight, he had still not come home.

Ibu began to worry, and she kept going outside to look down the street. Several times, I heard Ibu talking to Abdullah, who kept telling her not to worry.

Ayah arrived late that night, after we children had been told to go to sleep. I heard him and my mother talking deep into the night, and then the house was quiet.

The next day, we heard that all the contract coolies had been caught and jailed.

The prison was located at the foot of a small hill behind our house. If we climbed up the large orange tree in the fruit and vegetable garden behind our house, we could see the prison yard, where, every day, prisoners were punished.

From our garden, we could hear the singing and cursing of imprisoned lunatics. At that time, I didn't question why insane people were put in prison instead of an asylum. Sometimes I eagerly listened to their soulful singing, which became louder when they started cursing. For me, as a young child, hearing such forbidden words was delightful.

Ibu said that Ayah and the police had arrested the three contract coolies who had taken a stand against the Dutch supervisor. There were only three contract coolies, not five, as we had been told earlier. They were caught in a forest, not far from the plantation, hungry, cold, and filled with fear. They did not put up any fight. When they saw Ayah, they immediately surrendered and said, "To you, kanjeng, sir, we surrender our fate and beg for justice."

Ibu said that Ayah told her that the coolies had stabbed the Dutch opzichter because he was always harassing their wives. Apparently, the contract coolies had gone berserk when they could no longer bear to watch the opzichter torment their wives.

istri mereka. Itulah maka mereka memutuskan ramai-ramai menyerang si opzichter.

"Tidak salah, mereka itu," kata ibu yang rupanya merasa gusar sekali melihat kuli-kuli kontrak yang ditangkap itu. "Mestinya opzichter jahat itulah yang ditangkap," tambah ibu.

"Mengapa tidak ditangkap, dia?" tanya kami anak-anak.

Ibu memandang kami, dan berkata dengan suara yang lunak, "Karena yang berkuasa Belanda! Belanda tidak pernah salah."

"Tetapi dia yang jahat," kata kami mendesak ibu.

"Ibu tidak mengerti," sahut ibu, "tapi jangan kamu tanya-tanya pada ayah tentang ini. Dia sudah marah-marah saja, sejak pulang dari onderneming."

Ketika ayah pulang kantor dan setelah dia makan, maka kami semua dipanggil ke kamar kerjanya. Kelihatan muka ayah agak suram. Sesuatu yang berat menekan pikirannya. Setelah kami berkumpul, maka ayah berkata, "Tidak seorang yang boleh ke sana. Ayah larang anak-anak pergi ke kebun belakang. Ayah akan marah sekali pada siapa saja yang melanggar larangan ini."

"Mengapa, ayah?" tanya kami.

"Turut saja perintah ayah!" sahut ayah dengan pendek.

Kami pun mengerti. Jika ayah telah bersikap demikian tak ada gunanya membantah-bantah. Tapi hati kami penuh macam-macam pertanyaan, Mengapa dilarang? Ada apa?

Segera juga ibu kami serbu, hingga akhirnya untuk mendinginkan kami ibu pun berkata bahwa esok hari ketiga kuli kontrak itu akan diberi hukuman. Sebelum perkaranya dibawa ke depan hakim maka mereka akan dilecuti, karena telah menyerang opzichter Belanda.

Kecut hatiku mendengar cerita ibu. Rasanya badanku dingin menggigil. Dan setelah masuk kamar tidur, amat lama baru aku bisa tidur. Pikiranku terganggu mendengar kuli-kuli kontrak yang akan dilecuti esok pagi di penjara. Ketakutan berganti-ganti dengan nafsu hendak melihat betapa manusia melecut manusia dengan cemeti.

Pagi-pagi saudara-saudaraku yang harus ke sekolah telah berangkat. Dan kami yang belum bersekolah diberi tahu lagi oleh ayah dan ibu supaya jangan pergi ke kebun di belakang rumah kami.

Dari opas Abdullah kudengar mereka akan dilecut mulai jam sembilan pagi. Semakin dekat jam sembilan semakin resah dan gelisah rasa hatiku. Hasrat hatiku melihat mereka dilecut bertambah besar saja.

Ketika hari telah hampir lima menit menjelang jam sembilan hatiku tak dapat lagi kutahan, dan sambil berteriak pada ibu bahwa aku pergi bermain ke rumah sebelah maka aku lari ke luar pekarangan di depan rumah, ke jalan besar, berlari terus memutar jalan ke jalan besar di belakang rumah, masuk pekarangan rumah sakit, terus berlari ke belakang rumah sakit yang berbatasan dengan kebun di belakang rumah kami, memanjat pagar kawat, meloncat ke dalam kebun, dan dengan napas terengah-engah memanjat pohon jeruk, hingga sampai ke dahan di atasnya tempat aku biasa duduk dan melihat-lihat ke bawah, ke pekarangan belakang rumah penjara.

Pekarangan itu ditutupi batu kerikil. Di tengah-tengahnya telah terpasang tiga buah bangku kayu. Sepasukan kecil polisi bersenjata senapan berdiri berbaris di sisi sebelah kiri. Kemudian kulihat ayah keluar dari gang menuju pekarangan di belakang penjara, di sebelahnya kontrolir orang Belanda, asisten wedana, polisi, dokter rumah sakit. Dan kemudian dari gang lain keluarlah tiga orang yang akan dilecuti itu. Mereka hanya memakai celana pendek dan tangan mereka diikat ke belakang, diiringi oleh kepala rumah penjara dan dua orang polisi.

Hatiku berdebar-debar, dan takut kembali meremasi perutku. Akan tetapi aku tak hendak meninggalkan tempat persembunyianku. Aku hendak melihat juga apa yang akan terjadi.

Ketika kuli kontrak itu dibariskan dekat bangku-bangku kayu yang telah tersedia, mereka disuruh jongkok. Kepala rumah penjara kemudian membacakan sehelai surat. Dan aku lihat kontrolir mengangguk-angguk. Ayah berdiri tegang tidak bergerak-gerak. Kemudian ketiga kuli kontrak itu dibuka ikatan tangan mereka di belakang, ditidurkan telungkup di atas perut mereka di bangku, dan kaki dan tangan mereka diikatkan ke bangku.

"The contract coolies are not wrong," Ibu fumed. "Instead, they should have arrested that evil opzichter." Ibu was furious about the coolies' arrest.

"Why was the Dutch opzichter not arrested?" we asked.

Ibu looked at us and said softly, "The Netherlands has the power. The Dutch are never wrong."

"But he is the evil one," we insisted.

"I don't understand," said Ibu, "but don't ask your father about this. He has been in a bad mood since he came home from the plantation."

After Ayah finished his dinner, he called all of us to his office. Ayah looked gloomy. Something heavy weighed on him, making him depressed. After we gathered, Ayah said, "No one is allowed to go into the backyard. I forbid all of you to go there. I will be very angry with anyone who violates this prohibition."

"Why, Ayah?" we asked.

"Just follow my orders!" Ayah said shortly.

We understood. When Ayah behaved like that, there was no point in arguing. But our heads were full of questions: Why was it prohibited? What was wrong?

We immediately pestered Ibu with our questions.

She finally silenced us by saying that the three contract coolies would be punished the next morning. Even before the case was brought before a judge, they would be whipped for attacking the Dutch opzichter.

I was saddened to hear this. Shivering, I went to my bedroom. For quite some time, I couldn't sleep. Hearing that the contract coolies would be flogged the next morning made me toss and turn. Fear alternated with an intense curiosity to see how humans lashed other humans with whips.

The next morning, my older brothers left early for school. The rest of us, who were not yet old enough to attend school, were reminded not to go to the garden behind our house.

I heard from Opas Abdullah that the whipping would start at nine o'clock. The closer the time came, the more restless and uneasy I became. I anxiously waited to watch the lashing.

At five minutes to nine, I could no longer restrain myself. I yelled to Ibu that I was going to play next door, then I ran through the front yard and onto a big road. I continued to run on the big road as it wound behind my house. There, I entered the prison's hospital grounds.

The hospital backed up to the garden behind our house.

I climbed the wire fence that separated the hospital grounds from our garden and jumped into our backyard. Panting, I climbed the orange tree until I reached the branch where I always sat to look down into the prison yard.

The prison yard was covered with gravel. Three wooden benches had been placed in the center.

A small group of police, armed with rifles, was lined up on the left side of the yard.

I saw Ayah walk out of the alley that ran behind the prison toward the prison yard.

A Dutch controller, the district chief assistant, a police officer, and a physician from the hospital were with him.

Then the three contract coolies appeared from another alley. They only wore shorts and had their hands tied behind them. They were accompanied by the warden and three prison guards.

My heart was pounding and fear squeezed my stomach. But I did not want to leave my hiding place. I was too eager to see what would happen.

The contract coolies were told to line up near the wooden benches. The warden then read a document.

I watched the controller nod.

Ayah stood silently, straight and rigid.

Tiga orang mandor penjara kemudian maju ke depan, kira-kira 2 meter dari setiap bangku, di tangan mereka sehelai cemeti panjang yang hitam warnanya. Kemudian kepala penjara berseru, "Satu!"

Suaranya keras dan lantang. Tiga orang mandor penjara mulai mengayunkan tangan mereka ke belakang. Cemeti panjang berhelak ke udara seperti ular hitam yang hendak menyambar, mengerikan. Dan terdengarlah bunyi membelah udara, mendengarkan tajam; lalu bunyi cemeti melanggar daging manusia, yang segera disusuli jeritan kuli kontrak yang di tengah melonjakkan kepalanya ke belakang. Dari mulutnya yang terganga itu keluarlah suara jeritan yang belum pernah aku dengar dijeritkan manusia: melengkung tajam membelah udara, menusuk seluruh hatiku, dan membuat tubuhku seketika lemah-lunglai.

Karena amat sangat terpengaruh dengan apa yang kulihat, maka ketika hendak turun dan pohon aku salah meletakkan kakiku ke bawah dan menjerit terkejut, jatuh ke bawah amat sakitnya. Beberapa saat aku terhentak diam di tanah, dan kemudian aku menangis kesakitan. Opas Abdullah yang sedang berada di dapur datang ke belakang, melihat aku terbaring lalu cepat menggendongku ke rumah.

Sikuku amat sakitnya. Ibu memeriksanya dan berkata, "Sikumu terkilir. Dan lalu ditambahnya, "Ayah akan marah sekali, engkau melanggar perintahnya. Mengapa kau di kebun?"

Aku hanya menangis. Aku segera dibawa ke rumah sakit dan setelah manteri rumah sakit menarik tanganku, yang rasanya menambah sakit sikuku saja, dan kemudian tanganku diperban, aku disuruhnya tidur dan tidak boleh bermain-main.

Petangnya ayah pulang dari kantor. Aku ketakutan saja menunggunya. Setelah dia makan kudengar ibu bercakap-cakap dengan ayah. Tentu mengadukan aku, pikirku dengan takut.

Tak lama kemudian ayah datang melihat aku. Dia duduk di pinggir tempat tidur. Ditatapnya mukaku diam-diam, hingga aku pun terpaksa menundukkan mata.

"Engkau melihat semuanya?" tanya ayah.

"Ya. Aku salah. Ayah," kataku dengan suara gemetar ketakutan.

Ayah pegang tanganku dan kemudian berkata dengan suara yang halus sekali, akan tetapi yang amat sungguh-sungguhnya,

"Jika engkau besar, jangan sekali-kali kau jadi pegawai negeri. Jadi pamong praja! Mengerti?"

"Ya, Ayah!" jawabku.

"Kau masih terlalu kecil untuk mengerti," kata ayahku. "Sebab sebagai pegawai negeri orang harus banyak menjalankan pekerjaan yang sama sekali tak disetujuinya. Bahkan yang bertentangan dengan jiwanya. Untuk kepentingan orang yang berkuasa, maka sering pula yang haram menjadi halal, dan sebaliknya."

Kelihatannya ayah hendak meneruskan pembicaraannya. Tetapi dia lalu berhenti dan cuma berkata, "Ah, tidurlah engkau!"

The hands of the three contract coolies were untied. The men were each placed on a bench, lying on their stomachs face down, then tied to the bench by their legs and arms.

Three prison guards, each holding a black whip, then came forward. They halted about six feet from each bench.

The warden bellowed, "One!"

The prison guards swung their arms backward. The long whip snapped into the air like a black snake about to grab its prey. It was terrifying. A sound split the air, buzzing sharply; then came the sound of the whip ripping human flesh, immediately followed by the coolies' screams as they jerked their heads back. From their open mouths came screams that I had never heard before: the sharp, shrill screams filled the air, penetrated my whole heart, and instantly weakened me.

I was so much affected by what I saw that I missed my step as I climbed down the tree. Startled, I yelled and fell down very hard. For a moment, I lay gasping on the ground, then cried out in pain.

Opas Abdullah, who was in the kitchen, came to the backyard and found me lying on the ground. He quickly carried me to the house.

My elbow hurt badly.

Ibu examined it and said, "Your elbow is dislocated." She added, "Ayah will be very angry; you violated his orders. Why were you in the garden?"

I just cried. Ibu took me to the hospital.

The hospital's doctor pulled my hand to relocate my elbow, which only added to my pain. After he bandaged my arm, he told me to rest and not to play.

My father came home from work in the afternoon.

Afraid, I just waited for him. After he ate, I heard Ibu talking to him. I feared she was telling him about what had happened.

Shortly afterwards, Ayah came to see me. He sat down on the edge of the bed. He quietly looked at me, so I was forced to lower my eyes.

"Did you see everything?" Ayah asked.

"Yes. I did wrong, Ayah." My voice trembled with fear.

Father took my hand and then softly but firmly said, "When you grow up, don't ever become a civil servant. No civil service! Understand?"

"Yes, Yah!" I replied.

"You're still too young to understand," my father said. "People who are civil servants are forced to do many things they don't approve of at all. Even if it goes against all their personal morals. For the benefit of those in power, what is otherwise sinful becomes lawful and vice versa."

Ayah paused. It seemed he still had something to say. But finally, he only said, "Ah, nevermind. Go to sleep."
